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NOAA TAKES TO THE AIR TO SURVEY & LOCATE MARINE DEBRIS IN MAIN HAWAIIAN ISLANDS

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration held a Honolulu Harbor news conference today to discuss preliminary results of a two-week helicopter survey to identify and map derelict fishing gear and other marine debris that exists around the main Hawaiian Islands. The project is the first of its kind and part of a series of marine debris projects in Hawai'i funded by NOAA's Marine Debris Program to mitigate the problem of marine debris and help protect our marine environment. NOAA funding for this project was made possible with the support of Hawaii senior Senator Daniel K. Inouye.

"Marine debris is one of the most pervasive problems plaguing the world's oceans and coastal areas," said retired Navy Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Ph.D., under secretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA Administrator, who gave remarks at Honolulu's Pier 38. "This project demonstrates NOAA's commitment to Hawaii to promote local stewardship and the well-being of our beaches and coral reef habitats."

"In Hawaii, we are able to see the impacts of marine debris more clearly than most because atmospheric forces cause ocean surface currents to converge on our island state, bringing with them the vast amount of debris floating throughout the Pacific. I am pleased to see NOAA's commitment to keeping Hawaii free from marine debris and its devastating consequences through projects like this," said Senator Daniel K. Inouye.

"During the last Congress, the Senate introduced and passed by unanimous consent the Marine Debris Research and Reduction Act. This bill is intended to address the pervasive problem of marine debris, which is a major cause of death to marine mammals, birds, and other marine life and also threatens navigation safety and degrades important aquatic habitats, such as coral reefs and seagrass beds. I believe this bill will finally provide us with the ability to tackle and ultimately solve a worldwide problem that has lingered far too long. I hope to see this bill become law this Congress," said Inouye.

Trained personnel from NOAA's Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center are working from a helicopter to spot and survey the marine debris around the coastlines of Kaua'i and the Big Island of Hawai'i. Flying as many as five hours a day from February 13 - 28 personnel gather GPS data, photos, and other information that will be analyzed and used to create maps showing the distribution and abundance of the debris located. NOAA hopes to partner with state and county agencies and local businesses to use this information to identify and prioritize cleanup areas and identify sites for future monitoring.

Marine debris continues to present a hazard to marine life and habitat, as well as to safe navigation, in the main Hawaiian Islands. As recently as November 2004, a three ton mass of derelict fishing net in Kaneohe Bay was removed by an emergency team consisting of federal, state, and local partners. Washing ashore, these ghost nets can cause serious damage to reefs in the area, entangling and breaking coral.

(More)

Seema Balwani, the NOAA project supervisor and principal investigator states "While the issue of marine debris in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands has been addressed for more than 10 years, little is known about the abundance or impacts of derelict fishing gear on the nearshore ecosystems of the main Hawaiian islands. The time has come for us to increase the scope of our marine debris project and focus efforts on our local shorelines and reefs."

The Hawaii project is part of a nationwide effort that includes marine debris work in the Pacific Northwest (Alaska, Wash.), the Gulf coast (La., Miss.), and the Southeast coast (Fla.) of the United States.

The NOAA Marine Debris Program works with other NOAA offices including NOAA Fisheries and the National Ocean Service, as well as other federal, state and local agencies and private sector partners to support national, state, local and international efforts to protect and conserve our nation's natural resources and coastal waterways from the impacts of marine debris.

The Marine Debris Program is part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department. NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners and nearly 60 countries to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes.

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On the Web:

NOAA - <http://www.noaa.gov/>

NOAA's Marine Debris Program - <http://www.marinedebris.noaa.gov/>